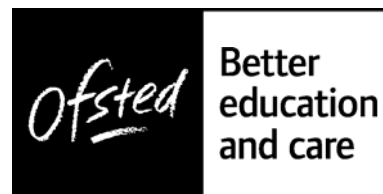


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Making Social Care
Better for People



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1 November 2006

Dear Mr Jeyes

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people.	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3

¹

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Excellent / outstanding
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate

Cambridgeshire County Council delivers a good contribution to maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people in the area. The council has clear priorities for action which have been demonstrated by recent improvements. Capacity for further improvement is good.

Being healthy

The contribution of the council to outcomes in this area is adequate. Teenage conceptions have fallen at a faster rate in the past year and are on course to achieve the 10 year target, though Fenland still presents special challenges. Schools are on target for completion of the Healthy Schools programme and to meet National Healthy Eating standards.

Progress in provision for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has been mixed. The overall government target for growth has been met and there has been some progress in providing services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with complex needs. However services for 16 and 17 year olds, and plans for round the clock assessment have made little progress so far. Overall the extent of Cambridgeshire's CAMHS achievement is lower than in similar authorities, though CAMHS response times for looked after children are good. There have been no referrals for acute treatment in 2005 from the Youth Offending Team (YOT), and lower than average referrals for non-acute services, partly due to an excellent in house psychological treatment programme in the YOT itself. Additional resources are required for the treatment of depression. There has been no progress overall since last year on the health and dental assessments for looked after children. They continue to be satisfactory with better provision for children placed within the county.

There are good integrated services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but access to speech and language therapy is still too slow. Cambridgeshire is successfully meeting a number of targets in government public health programmes but progress is slower in areas of greater socio-economic deprivation.

There has been encouraging progress in meeting targets for reducing smoking in pregnancy; breastfeeding and MMR vaccinations in some areas of the county which illustrate effective partnership working with the NHS. These need to be extended throughout the county.

Staying safe

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area overall. Child protection indicators are all good, or very good, and re-registration has improved to the top performance band. The numbers of children registered this year for child protection and those already on the Child Protection Register are now closer to the average in similar councils. There are three serious case reviews awaiting completion. The recommendations will point to the need for safer practice in working with children with learning disabled parents.

There has been some improvement in performance on assessment timescales, but it still has some way to go to match similar authorities.

The number of referrals to social services has risen markedly since last year, partly because of lower thresholds in the County Contact Centre and partly through increased notifications of domestic violence cases by the police.

There has been successful recruitment of additional local foster parents. Overall, the growth in local placements is expected to allow for some reduction in the number of more distant independent fostering placements, representing a potential cost saving. The Invest to Save programme will fund posts targeted at improving placements with relatives and friends, which have fallen this year to below average levels. The balance of placements is intended to shift towards more family placements, though the picture is distorted by increased numbers of older unaccompanied asylum seekers who are more suited to residential and hostel accommodation and independent living. The council continues to support a broad range of family support services which ensure that the number of looked after children remains relatively low. Placement stability performance has improved and is now good.

The inspection of the council's fostering services found 77% of standards are now being met compared to 44% last year. Adoptions of looked after children have risen this year to a very good level from an acceptable level last year. Only 50% of those placements were made within a year of the adoption decision. Despite this a number of hard to place sibling groups were successfully found permanent families.

Enjoying and achieving

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good. Standards of achievement are in line with similar authorities at Key Stage 1, above at Key Stage 2 and in line at Key Stages 3 and 4. The progress pupils make up to the age of 14 is good and is satisfactory and improving in Key Stage 4. The percentage of primary schools judged by inspections to be a cause of concern is lower than in similar authorities; in secondary schools it is in line. Well judged actions are taken by the authority in supporting schools causing concern. There is a prioritisation of schools, based upon data, to ensure that those which need it receive the most support.

The overall quality of early years settings is good. The proportion judged to be inadequate is small and is lower than the national average. Focussed support is provided for those where inspections identify the need for improvement, for example in issues relating to equal opportunities in inspections of childcare. The authority is providing targeted support, using a range of providers, for parents whose children exhibit challenging behaviour. Inspections identified actions for improvement in a higher proportion of settings providing full day care than is the case nationally. The authority has taken good steps to address issues of concern.

The number of children permanently excluded from primary schools is zero; in secondary schools it is in line with similar authorities. The number of fixed-term exclusions is low. The provision in pupil referral units for those who, for reasons of health or behaviour, do not attend mainstream schools is good. Attendance is in line with similar authorities in both primary and secondary schools, but the target for attendance was missed. The authority works well to try to ensure that pupils from the relatively large traveller communities attend

school. The attendance of looked after children is good. It is considerably better than in similar authorities, although they do less well in GCSE examinations. Only 38% achieved a qualification compared to 51% last year and 60% the year before. The proportion achieving five or more good GCSE passes is markedly lower than in similar authorities. This is despite the work of the dedicated team of teachers and good practice in the completion of personal education plans. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in primary schools and satisfactory progress in secondary schools. A good strategy is being used to enable schools to target help better for these pupils. The authority's record of promptly writing statements for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved markedly.

The authority has worked well with the local community in establishing an open access holiday centre in an area of need. This has resulted in a significant drop in anti-social behaviour in that area.

Making a positive contribution

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good. Young people are consulted by the council when it draws up its plans and their views are taken into account. The youth service is effective in encouraging young people to be responsible members of their communities and to participate in local and national democratic activities. Young members of the traveller community and disabled young people have planned and delivered two conferences inviting key policy makers.

There has been a good improvement in the proportion of children with disabilities leaving school with a plan to guide their transition to adult services. In 70% of these cases it is evident that the plan is well based on individuals' needs. The proportion of looked after children receiving convictions, final warnings and reprimands has been halved and is now at an acceptable level.

The recidivism rate has risen in the past year and was 17% higher than in similar authorities. There has been an overall improvement in the performance of the YOT. An increase in the provision of advice, including the use of weekend and holiday courts, has resulted in an increase in bail support. There is a lower level of remands.

The council, and its partners, provide a wide range of support for parents, for example courses for those whose children exhibit challenging behaviour. These show an impressive completion rate.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution of the council to outcomes in this area is adequate. The proportion of young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who are in education, employment or training is well above national averages. The proportion of care leavers in this position is below that in similar authorities, although there has been a good improvement in the last year. Community regeneration work is having a good impact in reducing the numbers of those not in education, employment or training but there remains a relatively high proportion in Fenland.

Satisfactory actions have been taken with the local Learning and Skills Council to improve 14-19 provision in schools but there is recognition that there is still some way to go. The use of colleges and work settings to provide education and training for young people is growing satisfactorily from a small base. In some schools pupils have little opportunity to study for vocational qualifications. Planning is at an early stage to enable young people to access a wider range of courses in different institutions, for example through joint timetabling and the provision of a suitable means of transport. The mapping of available courses at each provider has been completed. There is a means of monitoring the quality of courses which are provided by centres other than schools, from student feedback using Connexions but this is insufficiently formal. A more formal approach is not yet carried out. The performance of Cambridgeshire students at A level is strong. This is helped by the work of two sixth form colleges. In the north of the county, away from the sixth form colleges, A level results are satisfactory.

Very good advice for young people is provided by the local Connexions service. The length of stay for families in bed and breakfast accommodation has reduced and the target for achieving the Decent Homes standard is expected to be achieved. The proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation is low compared to similar authorities.

The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further

Service management is good as is the council's capacity for further improvement. This is demonstrated by the good recent improvements such as the quality of youth work; reduction in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training; increases in the proportion of looked after children living in county, as well as general improvements in children's attainment. Good partnerships have been established with providers in different areas of the council's work. The approach is generally one of good analysis of strengths and weaknesses in provision and a strong drive to improve. This determination is underpinned by good planning, with clear ambition and good auditing of the views of young people. These improvements in performance have come about at a time of structural change in the management of children's services. There is a shift in management culture to one of greater accountability. For example, in social care the 'work area teams' are beginning to be influenced by a stronger understanding of, and commitment to, achieving performance objectives.

There are still formidable challenges in developing the social care workforce where vacancies in some frontline teams are running at 30%, resulting in heavy use of expensive agency staff. The council needs urgently to adopt a comprehensive workforce strategy if it is to improve the proportion of qualified staff working with looked after children and children in need. The past year has seen a serious fall in both. More needs to be done to broaden provision for the education of 14-19 year olds.

The authority is committed to achieving better value for money in children's social care services. Cambridgeshire has a reasonable budgetary provision but needs to achieve better value for money in some areas. The unit cost of looked after children was 12.4% above similar councils last year and has risen 114% in four years compared to 41% in similar

councils and 33% in England, which is too high. Overall children's budget is higher than in similar authorities but has grown at a considerably slower rate over the past six years. It is likely that the key cost issue is the use of relatively expensive private sector foster placements, and the need to place children out of county due to the dearth of local foster placements. A good start has been made to recruiting higher numbers of local foster carers. This needs to be sustained, and developed, if the council is to achieve a virtuous circle of achieving better quality outcomes for children in its care, from within inevitably constrained local resources.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction in teenage conceptions • health schools programme on course to deliver • progress against targets in smoking in pregnancy; MMR vaccinations and breast-feeding • integrated services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities • multi systemic therapy in the youth offending team. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public health improvements in some relatively deprived areas of the county • comprehensive CAMHS services • health monitoring for looked after children placed outside the county.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transition plans for children with disabilities • net growth in local foster carers and improved fostering services • placement stability • adoptions • child protection services • net growth in local foster placements. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children placed at a distance from home • placements with relatives and friends • better value for money from independent foster care placements and residential care.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of early years settings • academic standards in primary schools and in Key Stage 3 • the progress made by children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in primary school • school attendance by looked after children • low rate of exclusions. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational attainment of looked after children.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low offending by looked after children • improvements in the performance of the youth offending team • consultations with young people. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recidivism levels of young offenders.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment or training • the quality of advice given by the Connexions service. • 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress on the 14-19 strategy • standards achieved in A level examinations in the north of the county • suitability of accommodation for care leavers.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the shift in management culture to one of greater accountability • good planning based on good analysis of data and use of young people's views • involvement of a wide range of partners. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruitment and retention of social care staff.

Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

Being Healthy

- Effectiveness of CAMHS services.
- Arrangements for monitoring of health services for looked after children placed outside Cambridgeshire.

Staying Safe

- Value for money in children's placements.
- Placements out of county.

Enjoying and achieving

- Corporate parenting approach to improving educational attainment by looked after children.

Making a positive contribution

- Outcomes from good parenting initiatives by the council and its partners.
- Progress on the 14-19 strategy.
- Improving standards in school sixth forms.

Achieving economic well-being

- Preparing care leavers for independent living.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS

Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection